




CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHERS TOWARD A SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

**BRUCE DAVIDSON LEE FRIEDLANDER GARRY WINOGRAND
DANNY LYON DUANE MICHALS EDITED BY NATHAN LYONS**



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This current book from the George Eastman House of Photography was prepared on the occasion of the exhibition, "Toward A Social Landscape," which opened at the George Eastman House in December of 1966. I am indebted to the photographers for their cooperation: Bruce Davidson, Duane Michals, Lee Friedlander, Danny Lyon and Garry Winogrand.

For their assistance in the preparation of the exhibition and the monograph, I would like also to thank the following: the Staff of the George Eastman House, with special thanks to Alice Andrews, Assistant Curator of Extension Activities, who acted as my assistant; Thomas Barrow, Curatorial Assistant; Robert Fichter, Curatorial Assistant; Robert Bretz, Assistant Curator of Collections; Carl Sesto, Museum Assistant; and Daniel Andrews.

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INTRODUCTION

NATHAN LYONS

If we are to confront the meaning of contemporary photographic expression devoid of the confusions and approximations of past terminology, then let us establish a working premise by asking: was a pepper to Edward Weston or a photogram to Moholy-Nagy less real than a breadline to Dorothea Lange?

What becomes implicit is that each photographer had a specific point of view which is to be understood within the context of the pictures they chose to make. While the content of their work varied to a large degree, their commitment as picture makers has been generally acknowledged. The fact that each point of view may not bring forth a like response for a given individual is obvious. What must be considered, however, is the confusion caused by using photography as a pawn in the controversy: what constitutes the meaning of reality in pictures? Our discourse concerning this matter has fragmented the photographic community into reverently biased schools of thought, and by doing so has retarded a much needed dialogue concerning ideas which are essential to an understanding of photographic expression.

If we pursue this line of reasoning further, then there is an additional question which must be asked: do evidences of a natural landscape have greater aesthetic value than evidences of what we might term a man-made landscape? Picture makers have continuously attempted to perceive relationships within their environment. As a result many have become increasingly conscious that these environmental relationships of objects involve associations with form other than purely literal terms.

Photography has achieved an unprecedented mirroring of the things of our culture. We have pictured so many aspects and objects of our environment in the form of photographs (motion pictures and television) that the composite

of these representations has assumed the proportions and identity of an *actual* environment. Within this environmental context the giving of a pictured significance to ordinary objects through photography has contributed greatly to a shifting graphic vocabulary of the twentieth century. Aside from the subjects and objects themselves, the structural disposition of the picture itself has undergone a definite change which is also, in part, attributable to the development of photographic representation.

This broadening of the source of experience could imply that our concept of "landscape" should be reevaluated from the classical reference point of *natural* environment to include as a referent the interaction of a "nexus between man and man, and man and nature." Gyorgy Kepes in *The New Landscape* further clarified this consideration when he stated, "We make a map of our experience patterns, an inner model of the outer world, and we use this to organize our lives. Our natural 'environment'—whatever impinges on us from outside—becomes our human 'landscape'—a segment of nature fathomed by us and made our home."

This might mean that the relationship of objects within this landscape could assume a greater degree of significance than we now choose to recognize or understand. In the past we might have assessed the work of the photographers in this book by using the term documentary or social realism, etc. While this might have helped to guide and organize our thinking, we should recognize that we have only been discussing on very general terms the acknowledgment of a kind of subject matter reference which barely recognizes the challenging question, what have these men—these photographers—contributed as experience to our lives?

The reference point, "Toward A Social Landscape," is not intended to establish a *neo-category*. There is still too

much confusion about what little there is that we think we understand about photography. What I am suggesting, however, is that our concept of environment and landscape expand on the terms that it must. If we lose the meaning of an expanding reference point, one which does not attempt to define the existence of things, but tends to establish a greater interrelatedness of things, then understanding might exist on less temporal terms. If we choose forms to convey something beyond the identity of form (form then only becomes a referent), then by this visual language which we have implied that we speak and understand, we would recognize the significance of photography on idiographic terms, as representing ideas and not providing illustrations for words.

Therefore the qualitative meaning of object relationships seen in the context of a more total landscape would mean a shifting of their denotative function. If certain kinds of objects establish reference points and the essential characteristics of the object remain constant but the environment we see them in changes, then the object attains a symbolic identity modified by the environment, or the object itself might modify the environment.

If one considers Joe Rosenthal's photograph, "Flag Raising on Iwo Jima" and contrasts it with Robert Frank's photographs in *The Americans* where he employs the use of the flag in a variety of contexts, the metaphoric use of the object becomes evident.

For a number of years in lectures throughout the country, I have suggested the need for an evaluation of what might be considered authentic photographic forms. One which I have paid particular attention to, and which has undergone extensive research, has been the question of the "snapshot." What is generally implied is the state of picture awareness of the rank amateur. Interestingly enough the

snapshot's significance in modifying our attitude toward picture content and structure has been quite remarkable. The accidents of millions of amateurs devoid of a picture vocabulary—which produced an outpouring of multiple exposures, distortions, unusual perspectives, foreshortening of planes, imbalance—has contributed greatly to the visual vocabulary of all graphic media since before the turn of the century.

Within the context of the development of photography, the first conscious effort made to recognize the vitality of this picture form was the photographer, Alfred Stieglitz. Not only his article, "The Hand Camera—Its Present Importance," written in 1897, but quite often in the leading visual journal of the time, *Camera Work*, he captioned many of his photographs, "Snapshot." While this fact may be inconsistent with a traditional interpretation of possibly one of the most myth understood photographers of our time, too much evidence exists to attribute this consideration to mere speculation.

The mind conditioning aspects of visual persuasion are so much in evidence today that we should not overlook how we have been conditioned to look at and understand pictures. The incorporation of concern has developed from defensive ground, tucked away and cataloged: documentary, snapshot, realism, pictorial—a hodge-podge of terminology that has provided a refuge for the inadequate as well as a misunderstanding of the significant.

I do not intend to suggest that this view that I have adopted is shared by the photographers represented in this book. Most of them avoid establishing a verbal reference to their work. Friedlander on one rare occasion simply stated, "I'm interested in people and people things." Winogrand in an interview with Mary Orovon in *U.S. Camera* suggested, "For me the true business of photography is to

capture a bit of reality (whatever that is) on film . . . if, later, the reality means something to someone else, so much the better."

It was in part my research into the snapshot as an authentic picture form which led me to develop the exhibition from which this book is derived. During my first discussion with Duane Michals, the issue was central to our conversation. In a letter to me some months later he expressed the following:

"Because of my involvement with my photographs, it is difficult for me to really see them objectively. Talking about them is like talking about myself. The only real idea that I have about them is that they are essentially snapshots. For snapshots, I feel, often have an inherent simplicity and directness that I find beautiful. The roots of my photographs are in this tradition.

"However, I think that the photographer must completely control his picture and bring to it all his personality, and in this area most photographs never transcend being just snapshots. When a great photographer does infuse the snapshot with his personality and vision it can be transformed into something truly moving and beautiful."

I do not find it hard to believe that photographers who have been concerned with the question of the authentic relevance of events and objects should consciously or unconsciously adopt one of the most authentic picture forms photography has produced. The directness of their commentary of "people and people things" is not an attempt to define but to clarify the meaning of the human condition. The reference point of each photographer is presented as a separate portfolio. The combined statement is one of comment, observation, aluminum, chrome, the automobile, people, objects, people in relation to things, questioning, ambiguity, humor, bitterness and affection.

BRUCE DAVIDSON

Born Oak Park, Illinois, 1933. Became actively interested in photography, 1943. Studied photography with Ralph Hotterley at Rochester Institute of Technology, followed by studies in philosophy, and graphic arts with Alexey Brodovitch, Herbert Matter and Joseph Albers at Yale University. After serving in United States Army, free-lanced in Paris and New York. Joined Magnum Photos, Inc., as Associate Photographer, 1958; elected to membership, 1959. Awarded Guggenheim Fellowship to produce photographic study of youth in America, 1962. Traveled widely producing numerous photo-essays including "The Widow of Montmartre," "The Clown," "Brooklyn Gang," "England," "Scotland," and "Wales." Taught photography, School of Visual Arts, 1964; private workshops, 1965-66. One-man exhibitions: Art Institute of Chicago, 1965; George Eastman House traveling exhibition, 1965; San Francisco Museum of Art, 1965; Museum of Modern Art, 1966.

Group exhibitions:

- 1958 Museum of Modern Art.
- 1959 "Photography at Mid-Century," George Eastman House.
- 1960 Museum of Modern Art.
- 1962 "Ideas In Images," Worcester Art Museum.
- 1964 "Contemporary Photographs from the George Eastman House Collection 1900-1964," New York World's Fair.
Museum of Modern Art.
"Sight and Insight: A Contemporary Portfolio of Creative Photography," IBM Gallery.
- 1965 "Profile of Poverty," Pon Am Building.

White House Festival of the Arts.
"About New York Night and Day 1915-1965,"
Gallery of Modern Art.
"Peace on Earth," Hallmark Gallery.

1966 Underground Gallery.

"Selmo Last Year," Action Theatre, Lincoln Center.
"The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellows in Photography," Philadelphia College of Art.
"American Photography: The Sixties," Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery.
"Contemporary Photography Since 1950," prepared by the George Eastman House in collaboration with the New York State Council on the Arts.
"Toward A Social Landscape," George Eastman House.

Published:

- 1959 *Leica Photography* (Mar)
- 1960 *The Queen* (periodical)
Photography Annual
- 1961 *Infinity* (Mar and Apr)
Photography Annual
- 1962 *Ideas In Images* (exhibition catalogue)
Contemporary Photographer (Summer)
"What Photography Means to Me," *Popular Photography* (May)
- 1963 *Encyclopedia of Photography*, Vol. 6
Popular Photography (Mar)
- 1964 *The Bridge*, by Gay Talese
- 1966 *American Photography: The Sixties* (exhibition catalogue)

The Negro American, edited by T. Parsons and K. Clark, introduction by President Johnson
 "The Bruce Davidson Show," by David Vestal,
Infinity (Aug)
Bard College (Winter)
The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellows in Photography (exhibition catalogue)

Film:

1966 "On Your Way Up," for Fashion Institute of Technology.

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LEE FRIEDLANDER

Born Aberdeen, Washington, 1934. Began photographing, 1948. Studied photography at Art Center, Los Angeles, and with Edward Kaminski. Received Guggenheim Fellowships for photographic studies of the changing American scene, 1960 and 1962. One-man exhibition, the George Eastman House, 1963. To Spain, 1964. Artist-in-residence, University of Minnesota, Spring quarter, 1966.

Group exhibitions:

1960 Milan.

1963 "Photographs for Collectors," Museum of Modern Art.

"Photography 63 'An International Exhibition,'" George Eastman House.

1964 "The Photographers' Eye," Museum of Modern Art.
"Contemporary Photographs from the George Eastman House Collection 1900-1964," New York World's Fair.

1966 "Contemporary Photography Since 1950," traveling exhibition prepared by George Eastman House in collaboration with the New York State Council on the Arts.

"The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellows in Photography," Philadelphia College of Art.

"Toward A Social Landscape," George Eastman House.

Published:

1960 "Lee Friedlander," by James Thrall Soby, *Art in America* (June)

1963 "The Little Screens," by Walker Evans, *Harper's Bazaar* (Feb)

Photography 63 (exhibition catalogue)

Current, No. 36 (April)

Contemporary Photographer (Fall)

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DUANE MICHALS

Born McKeesport, Pennsylvania, 1932. Received Bachelor of Arts degree, University of Denver. To Russia as tourist, began photographing, 1958. Free-lance photographer, New York City. One-man exhibitions: Underground Gallery, 1963, 1965.

Group exhibitions:

1959 Image Gallery.

1966 "American Photography: The Sixties," Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery.

"Contemporary Photography Since 1950," traveling exhibition prepared by the George Eastman House in collaboration with the New York State Council on the Arts.

"Toward A Social Landscape," George Eastman House.

Published:

1964 *Du* (Feb)

Infinity (June)

Contemporary Photography (Spring)

1966 *American Photography: The Sixties* (exhibition catalogue)

"Duane Michals: People and Places," by Martin Fox, *Print* (Mar/Apr)

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GARRY WINOGRAND

Born New York City, 1928. Began photographing while in Air Force during World War II. Studied painting at City College of New York, 1947-48; Columbia University, 1948. Studied photography with Alexey Brodovitch at New School for Social Research, 1951. One-man exhibition, Imago Gallery, 1960. Awarded Guggenheim Fellowship for photographic studies of American life, 1964.

Group exhibitions:

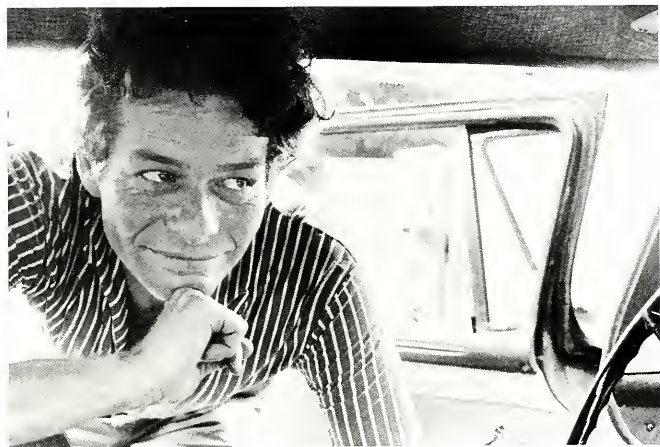
- 1955 "The Family of Man," Museum of Modern Art.
- 1957 "70 Photographers Look at New York," Museum of Modern Art.
- 1959 "Photographers' Choice," Workshop Gallery.
- 1963 "Photographs for Collectors," Museum of Modern Art.
"Photography 63/An International Exhibition," George Eastman House.
"Five Unrelated Photographers," Museum of Modern Art.
- 1964 "Contemporary Photographs from the George Eastman House Collection 1900-1964," New York World's Fair.
- 1965 White House Festival of the Arts.
"Recent Acquisitions," Museum of Modern Art.
"About New York, Night and Day," Gallery of Modern Art.
- 1966 "Contemporary Photography Since 1950," traveling exhibition prepared by the George Eastman House in collaboration with the New York State Council on the Arts.
"The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Founda-

tion Fellows in Photography," Philadelphia College of Art.
Underground Gallery.
"Toward A Social Landscape," George Eastman House.

Published:

- 1954 "Garry Winogrand," by Arthur A. Goldsmith, Jr., *Photography* (Oct)
Photography Annual
- 1955 *Photography Annual*
- 1956 *Photography Annual*
- 1963 *Photography 63* (exhibition catalogue)
- 1966 "Garry Winogrand," by Mary Orován, *U. S. Camera* (Feb)

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